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OPR

8 August 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: Samuel V. Wilson, Lieutenant General, USA  
Deputy to the DCI for the Intelligence Community

SUBJECT: Stating Uncertainties in Intelligence Estimates

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1. This is in response to your letter to Dr. Proctor of 25 July 1975. As you have noted, the problem of stating more explicitly the uncertainties in political judgments has been with us for a long time. Sherman Kent, despite heroic efforts, was not entirely successful in winning acceptance for his scheme of attributing mathematical odds to verbal expressions of probability. Perhaps the best exposition of Sherman's ideas is an article in Studies in Intelligence, Vol. 8, No. 4, Fall 1964. Sherman himself sponsored a fairly ambitious project to find out what the producers and the customers of intelligence estimates meant -- in numerical terms -- in the use of common estimative words. This project, carried out by [ ] is described in an article in the same issue of Studies cited above.

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2. The [ ] and Kent articles illustrate the inherent difficulties in using numerical equivalents of estimative words to convey a more precise meaning of uncertainty. Doubtless there have been other efforts in the past ten years to tackle the problem, and one could review this activity and summarize the results. It would, however, be a pretty sterile exercise, ending with conclusions not very different from Kent and [ ]

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3. We would suggest instead that some new techniques be brought to bear on the problem of more explicit statements of uncertainty. The Analytical Techniques Group of OPR as part of its work in the development of forecasting techniques and predictive measures has dealt with the need to reduce ambiguity in intelligence assessments. The various Bayesian analyses conducted by this Group constitute one approach to improved clarity in expressions of uncertainty. The experience of the Analytical Techniques Group in the use of quantitative measures and group assessments suggests that the problem of uncertainty extends back to the point at which the intelligence problem is defined. To come up with more explicit intelligence assessments it is necessary to articulate the problem more carefully and to design the analysis more systematically -- or more imaginatively -- than is normally done.

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4. The Analytical Techniques Group is now testing procedures by which forecasting and estimative techniques currently used by industrial and consulting firms can be applied to the intelligence process. Of particular interest is the use of subjective -- but explicitly formulated -- expert opinion to assess the impact of a variety of contingencies upon a given state of affairs. Should these experiments yield positive results, the new techniques would enable a working group of intelligence analysts to identify more clearly the areas and levels of uncertainty within a particular intelligence question, and to express the uncertainty with greater clarity. The use of such an approach would tend to generate estimates of a range of possible outcomes or future scenarios at various levels of probability.

5. This project is still in an exploratory phase in OPR. Our previous experiences with the adaptation of techniques and methods from academic or business applications to intelligence suggest that it generally takes more time and sweat than originally thought. Nonetheless, the various facets of forecasting so far examined show considerable promise and may help directly to make explicit the uncertainties inherent in political judgments.



LEWIS J. LAPHAM  
Director, Political Research

cc: DDI

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DDI-1976-75

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Intelligence Community Staff

25 JUL 1975

IC 75-2452

Dr. Edward W. Proctor  
Deputy Director for Intelligence  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Ed:

During recent meetings of the NSCIC Working Group, Ambassador Ellsworth and other members have pressed for the production of a paper on the problem of how to explicitly state uncertainties in intelligence estimates. I would like to bring you up to date on this matter, and request your assistance.

This is not exactly a new problem, as anyone familiar with Sherman Kent's efforts to wrestle with it will remember. Yet it is clear that high-level users of intelligence are still seized with it. Accordingly I have seen to it that briefings to the NSCIC Working Group address points related to probabilities and confidence levels on topics such as SALT, MBFR, and Warning.

Members of the Working Group welcomed these responses but suggested that together they provide only "30-40 percent" of the answer to the broad question. The Group wishes us now to cover the problem of expressing uncertainties in the "softer" areas--e.g., in political judgments. I have agreed to see what could be done.

In this connection, I would like to draw on the expertise in the DDI. There would be value--I believe--in a study that reviews the various attacks on the problem over the years and draws some general conclusions on where we now stand.

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[ ] has informally consulted Lew Lapham about this matter and Lew said he would be glad to give the matter some thought. Please let me know how you react to the idea.

Sincerely,

[ ]

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Samuel V. Wilson  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Deputy to the DCI for the  
Intelligence Community

cc: Director of Political  
Research

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MEMORANDUM FOR: EWP (Info . VW/HR/DR)

Sam Wilson would like your reaction to the preparation (by OPR?) of a study of the problem of expressing uncertainties in political judgments in estimates.

Suggest giving action to Lew Lapham. Copies to OCI and OSR.

*very. Only peripherally. He is addressing the broader question of the impact of intel. on foreign policy.*

Ben

Ben:

*I think that this is one of the topics [redacted] was looking into in her OTR study group - Please check first.*

Date 25 July 1975

*Ed*

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FORM 101 USE PREVIOUS EDITIONS

DOCUMENT SEPARATOR SHEET

OFFICE OF THE DD/I

22 July 1975

NOTE FOR: Director of Political Research

Lew--

I would like to hold off any action on this proposal for a while for several reasons:

- We are losing conference room space in other parts of the building, and we all are concerned about whether what is left will be sufficient.
- I don't think that putting 6 people in an area of 375 square feet is very good for analytical work.
- We are working with the Logistics people to straighten out our whole space problem. They have come up with a new plan which is now under review in the DDA. To make your suggested move now might complicate this situation.
- Even if we put your order in now, work would not be started until the end of the summer. By that time your 6 summer interns will have left. We expect to discuss the new Logistics plan within a week or two. If it doesn't satisfy us, we can reconsider converting your conference room.

/s/ Ed

Ed Proctor

cc: DDI Management Staff

21 July 1975

NOTE FOR: Ed

SUBJECT : OPR Space

I think you ought to ask Lew to hold off before he converts his conference room:

a. OER is getting rid of one of its conference rooms and they both are used almost constantly.

b. Putting 6 people into an area of 375 sq. feet doesn't do much for analysis.

c. Logistics people have come up with a plan which they say will take care of our immediate needs. It has been briefed to John McMahon who endorses, and Blake is getting briefed this week.

d. Even if Lew converted, it wouldn't be done until the end of summer, by which time 6 summer interns would have left. So I would hope that he could somehow or other get by until the Logistics plan can get started.

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18 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : OPR Space

1. This memorandum is prepared in order to seek your assistance in resolving OPR space problems in a manner least disruptive to the creative research process.

2. OPR is unable to accommodate its FY 76 T/O of 80 people and a handful of part-timers within its present assigned space. [redacted] 25X1 was advised sometime ago that OPR would require space for about four people before the end of the summer and that later in the year additional space would be required, and warned me that such space would not be optimum for people in analytical and reflective work.

3. True to his promise (and his warning), about 200 square feet have been identified in a very large CRS bull pen on the ground floor. This space is set off with half partitions and is presently occupied by two Security Officers. It would be possible to use the space for three people. There is, very naturally, a substantial amount of diversified activity going on within the bull pen, people walking back and forth in the corridors discussing their problems, a great deal of typing and other office machines operating; in short, researchers attempting to work there would be surrounded by noisy distractions.

4. Last week I showed the area to each one of the OPR Staff Chiefs. They were unanimous in their feeling that the area was simply an unsuitable place for an OPR analyst to do quality work and that the consequences on both morale and production in assigning any analyst there, either newly hired or experienced, would be unacceptable.

5. Consequently, we reviewed the options of utilizing the space under our own control. The options are few, and all of them are to some extent distasteful. We finally concluded that we should give up our conference room (375 square feet) and partition it for office use. We are most reluctant to do this, for we make a good deal of use of this facility for ourselves, and it is heavily used by other




SUBJECT: OPR Space

offices when not engaged for OPR purposes. It is my understanding that conference room space is at a premium in the building, and that Logistics will oppose reconfiguration of conference room space. This is understandable. I am sure that OPR is going to have difficulty locating conference space when it is needed. It is far preferable, however, to the alternative we have been offered.

6. I am therefore seeking your approval to reconfigure the OPR conference room for office use and your support with Logistics to implement the decision. We believe that we can use this conference room space for six analysts. Later in the year when additional space is required, we're simply going to have to crowd more people into the space we have in order to house them all unless circumstances change in the Headquarters building. The OPR Staff Chiefs are, as I have said, unanimous in their conviction that this is preferable to the utilization of semi-partitioned bull pen space.

7. It is my intention to continue an active recruitment program to identify high-quality candidates to fill our projected FY 77 T/O of 88 when and if it is approved. However, I do not plan to make any hiring commitments until we have some assurance that suitable space will become available. For as long as the space situation remains unchanged, we will simply have to live with our present T/O.

8. I want to emphasize that nothing in this memorandum is to be construed as implying criticism of DDI Management Staff. I fully appreciate that the problem is not of their making. Our objective is simply to come up with the least undesirable means for creating an environment as conducive as possible to creative research.

  
LEWIS J. WAPHAM  
Director, Political Research

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cc: Chief, DDI Management Staff

TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE 18 July 1975
TO: <del>DDI</del> /ADDI		
ROOM NO. 7E44	BUILDING Hqs.	
REMARKS:  Paul - Lapham wants my approval to convert the OPR conference room to analyst office space. Is there any good reason not to do this. J.		
FROM: D/PR		
ROOM NO. 3E63	BUILDING Hqs.	

FORM NO. 241  
1 FEB 55REPLACES FORM 36-8  
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

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